

Harry Chapin

"Stranger With The Melodies"

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It was my first night in that rooming house
In the last room down the hall
I heard a hoarse voice and an old guitar
Coming through the paper thin walls

A crazy nonsense nursery rhyme
That did not mean a thing
But for the first of what was to be a thousand times
This is what I hear him sing

Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around to D

I had to lay there listening
It seemed he was in the room
This stranger with his melody
Singing there in the gloom

And he repeated it over and over again
Such a soft and sinkin' sound
It was kind of like a music box
That was slowly winding down

You see, he sang it, he hummed it
Whistled it, and he strummed it
He laughed it and he cried it
He did everything but hide it

And he sang
Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around for me

So I lay there in that lumpy bed
Countin' choruses instead of sheep
'Til I banged on the wall and out I called
"Hey bub, I need some sleep"

The sudden void of silence

Then I heard that hoarse voice say
"It weren't so long ago, boy
They paid me to play "

I said, "It's kind of late for music, sir
Two hours 'til it's daylight"
He answered, "I need my music most
In these dark hours of the night

You see I've tried gettin' high on something son
But it only brings me down
Staying dry don't work out better, boy
'Cause my eyes get wet and I drown

Won't you please let me continue
And I'll be in your debt?
You see I'm not singing to remember, son
I'm just singing to forget"

And he sang
Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around for me

That's when I said
"If I'm supposed to listen to you sir
Just one quick question then
Why in the hell do you sing one song
Over and over again?"

And this is what he said
He said, "I gave her the music, son
She gave me the words
Together we'd write the kind of songs
The angels must have heard

Of course we'd fight like cats and dogs
But life ain't no rosebud dream
Still whatever we'd do everybody knew
We truly were a team

I can't remember now if I done her wrong
Or if she done wrong to me
But all I know that when I let her go
That it did not set me free"

That's when I said, "You sound like what's-his-name"
He said, "That's who I am
But you can't wrap a name around you, boy
'Cause it really don't mean a damn"

"You see, a song don't have much meaning
When it don't have nothing to say
What she could do was magic, son
All I could do was play"

He started singing again
That's when I drifted off
Maybe I dreamed what I heard
'Bout this stranger with his melody
Who'd gone and lost the words

Hold that D chord on the old guitar
'Til I found the G
Drop it down to old E minor
'Til the A chord rolls back home around to D

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